REMEMBER WHO YOU ARE

September 20, 1987, Morning Worship Service

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Centennial Celebration

Broad Street Presbyterian Church, Columbus, Ohio

As I remember who I am
it has a lot to do with who you are.

I cannot begin without saying what should not need to be said and in a sense can never be said adequately and yet must be said and that is that I am glad to be here, and I love seeing you again and that you and this place and this city will always be a major part of what the Buchanans call home. Thomas Wolfe was only metaphorically right. Sometimes you can come home.

+ congratulations Janet Halliday + Committee

I also wish to say thank you to Tom York for his graciousness in allowing all this presiding

over it with such sensitivity and efficiency and even apparently enjoying it. He is a man of unusual courage. [redacted] Tom York has done it all at once - all of us - in one service. So, Tom, thank you for your bravery and let me say what is in the heart of each of us and that is that our love for this place now focuses on you, that this group of brothers and sisters is part of your personal Communion of Saints, that we pray for you, cheer for you and pull for you - even if you are courageously foolish, or foolishly courageous enough to have us all back at the same time.

Al Smith and I consulted about how to exercise the privilege and responsibility of preaching on this day and chose an important text through which to reflect on the occasion - and a title - Remember Who You Are.

That's what Centennials are for, of course. To remind us who we are. So are family reunions and anniversaries and birthdays. They tell us

an identity which is given to us -

about an identity which is ours apart from anything we have done, a history which precedes us and a future out ahead which will succeed us. Their focus, their center, as it were, is us - we who celebrate - we who remember the past in order to remember who we are now.

~~A major concern among us is that~~ this generation of Americans may be losing touch with an important part of our identity because we don't remember the past.

Professor E. D. Hirsch, in a book entitled Cultural Literacy, suggested that ~~basic data about who we are is not known by many Americans...~~ a generation

In a recent survey "of one thousand, sixteen to eighteen year olds, half could not identify Churchill or Stalin, 75% had no idea what Reconstruction was and 10% thought Peter Ustinov was the leader of the Russian Revolution."

16-18

[See Craig Dykstra, Memory & Truth, Theology Today, July 1987, P. 159 ff] That's a quote - one could be too careful about footnotes

In A fascinating book about memory loss, The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat, observes -

the author

"you have to begin to lose your memory, if only in bits and pieces, to realize that memory is what makes our lives. Life without memory is no life at all. Our memory is our coherence, our reason, our feeling, even our actions. Without it, we are nothing." [Luis Bunel, in The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat. Oliver Sacks, cited by Dykstra, Ibid, p. 60]

So, it's not only okay to stand around at reunions reminiscing and laughing and shedding a tear together. It is good and necessary because what we are actually doing is remembering who we were in order to move into a future with intentionality and integrity and faithfulness. to that identity which is ours as a gift

in order to know who we are w/ freshness & strength and that -- in order

Who are you?

You are wonderful church which has distinguished itself for 100 years.

You are a church that knows a secret and that is that it is the best part of Presbyterianism to keep together -

theology and mission

to synthesize

faith and action

to combine in creative and dynamic tension the love of God and love of world ~~and ardor of the heart and zeal for justice~~.

You have remembered that God calls a people to follow into an unknown wilderness at times and never to remain in its opulent tents, enjoying its prestige, status and comfort.

You have avoided the less attractive characteristic of public religiosity in this culture, which is eager to use the world's criteria for its own success.

You have been willing to take chances, to open your doors and your hearts where prudence would dictate caution.

You have always looked out and asked about the needs of people and in that looking out you have communicated something about the Gospel of Jesus Christ that simply does not get communicated in thunderously successful enterprises that ask

* You have dared to represent an alternative here - You have been a place in this country where new ideas, sometimes controversial ideas found expression. You have been willing to deal with + talk about hard + over-racism sexism language poverty - education medical ethics You have risked modeling the openness + creativity of J.C. -

simply sells out to the culture /

enormous success Financially - but w/ no accountability + no discernable love for the world + how little credibility..

The fence - later Homeless - city not sure

only about the emotional needs of their own constituents. +contributors...

God bless you for that.

"Remember who you are, ~~remember who I am.~~"

When I do—

I am

Paul S.
Lee
Ruth
Art
Gerry G.
Barbara Dv2
Jerry B.
Judy H.

~~I'm~~ a former pastor of this church. A colleague with Paul and Lee and Art and Ruth and Gerry Gregg and Barbara, Jerry and Judy and I stand in a very distinguished line - Marsten Palmer - whose portrait was stolen off the wall of ~~Palm~~ Hall during my watch, and Harry Cotton who became my mentor and friend before he died, and Gause Little and Ray Kearns and Al Smith who was here while other urban churches were ~~either~~ scurrying into the corners of irrelevancy or high-tailing it to the safe green pastures of suburbia, while this church made decisions which gave it life and now a ~~life~~ live that extends into an open future and contains a new name - Tom York.

Who I am includes being part of this community of faith - its preacher for a while.

I keep a journal of sorts and my coming back prompted me to something I ~~must~~ do today ~~set me~~ to reading through a bit of it. I'd like to read you what I wrote on March 10, 1984.

to do smooth live new dmn

It was a Saturday morning. The Committee working on plans for the organ renovation was meeting. The subject was the possible placement of the pipes on the wall. And in order to get the feel of it we were in here - sitting on the floor. I was so taken with what this place looks like from the floor that I continued to do it - come in here on a Saturday morning and sit down - or better yet lie down and look around. You might want to make sure no one else is around before you do this.

This is what I wrote on March 10, 1984:

"sitting in soft morning light, something provocative happens, something spiritually suggestive. The perspective here is fascinating, the shapes, forms, shadows. Without artificial light something good happens to the color of the wood, first - rich, earthy, brown and then the subtle shadowing of carved rosettes, arches, crosses, ... symbols of so much that is universally Christian, yet individually of these particular people who sit here praying, hoping,

weeping, rejoicing.

From this angle, the pulpit - tempted to say mine, mine for this while? or not mine at all, theirs perhaps, or God's, in which I dare to stand on occasion? - from here, the pulpit... such wooded strength rooted firmly, balanced, not precariously but with symmetrical intention. ('Here I stand,' it says) yet suspended, nearly, it seems from down here, between heaven and earth or blue sky and city street.

And the choir - the chancel, surrounded with arches reminiscent of medieval cathedrals and monks at prayer, chanting Gregorian in soft candlelight - our forbears.

And the windows through which light comes better when its source is outside and this morning ~~[illegible]~~ bathes the wood and rose and Jack ~~[illegible]~~ Greaves careful colors and makes suggestive shadows.

The Chairman, Dick Maths, asked if I had anything to add ~~regarding the comparative bidding process~~ to the discussion and, startled, I said 'no'."

I am a former preacher to this congregation.

I will always be that. And I have become something else. I am a grandfather. I have discovered over the years that all grandparents say essentially the same three things -

1) Isn't this child the most exquisite, most beautiful baby in the world?

2) This event ~~My becoming a grandparent~~ magnifies and eclipses my own parenting in ways I can't begin to understand.

3) Here let me show you some pictures.

Begin here 5/11/92

Those three are true, I now know, including the third one, and in that I did look at many of yours for eleven years, it only seemed fair that you take a look at Caitlin Elizabeth Andrew. (*) Cameron Buchanan Andrew

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Remember who you are.

One day that question came up. Who do people say the Son of Man is.

One day Jesus asked his disciples what other people were saying about him. "Funny you should ask," they said. "Some people think you are John the Baptist... we've even heard someone suggest that you are one of the great prophets of Israel reincarnated."

Notice that Jesus doesn't even acknowledge their speculative suggestions and instead redirects the question to them in the most personal way: "But who do you say I am?" There is no suggestion that they had ever discussed it. And so Peter must have left them gasping, when he heard his own voice saying, "You are the Christ, the annointed one, Messiah, the Son of the Loving God."

Now, the classic treatment of this incident includes stopping right here and rolling up our sleeves and digging into the meaning of those words. We Presbyterians, whose forte has been [redacted] literate religion, want to head out for the library and find out what recent German scholarship is saying about "the Annointed One."

In fact, I think the disciples wanted to stop right there, too. I hear them saying, "Now, Jesus, how exactly does what Peter just said correspond to what the Prophets and Rabbis teach?" But there is so much momentum here, so much energy, Jesus won't allow it and says to Peter - "Blessed are you Simon

- congratulations! That's quite an insight. In fact, it's a God-given moment of revelation." And still the momentum pushes on - "You are Peter and on this rock I will build a church."

There it is!! The point is not speculation. The point is not what we like to call Christology. The question is not finally who Jesus is - but who they are.

"You are the Christ - and you are Peter."

"You are Son of the Loving God - but you - you are a rock on which I'm going to build a church."

And so, before you know it the Biblical question evolves - changes right in front of your eyes...

The matter of Jesus' divine nature ends up being a human question.

Theology becomes life lived

So today Remember who you are becomes Remember who you must be.

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our focus is what the Church has believed about Jesus - but also what it has been - what people have - who you are -

~~The past is important, but not nearly as important as the future.~~

You must be what you have been. You must show this city that religion is not hopelessly archaic; that the Gospel of Christ, when it gets lived in a church is a dynamic, creative and fertile source of new life.

Tom Driver put it this way -

"The main purpose of the church is not to remember Jesus. It's main purpose is to participate now, in present - future time, in the redemption of the world."

[Christ in a Changing World, p. 11]

"You are Peter - you are a rock on which I will build a church.

And you know, that is exactly what he did. Oh, Peter didn't always remember who he was. In fact, he forgot, flagrantly, appallingly.

In the next breath Peter has already forgotten.

And at the end, in a courtyard, at dawn,

Peter - the Rock - denies ever knowing Jesus. And when their eyes meet: Jesus, now being marched out of the interrogation, and to his death - when their eyes locked, Peter's fill with tears of a profound shame & guilt. He had forgotten - not who Jesus was - but who he was. He had forgotten that he was a Rock

But Jesus didn't forget. God's grace in Jesus Christ accepted, forgives, embraced, heals and recreated Simon, Son of Jonah - who in spite of himself became a rock upon whom a church is built.

So that is where it rests doesn't it? For us - who like Peter - are capable of appalling forgetfulness: who can be brave disciples one minute, full of resolve and forget all about it the next.

The good news is that the issue rests with him as it always has.

He called the church into being

He has given it life in the past.

He will give it the resources it needs in the future.

As we remember who we are... enjoying memories of the past - may we also remember who he

* The point of this is that Simon - got a new name, Peter - the Rock, not because of his strength, or even his bravery, but because Jesus would not let go of him.

& these two men who never had this extraordinary experience of who they are . .

We celebrate the past, not as an exercise in self-congratulation, but because there have been occasions of faithfulness when people here knew who they were + something of Jesus Christ was affirmed + came alive ..

We give thanks for the past - because of his faithfulness .. ([illegible])

The good news is that Jesus Christ will be faithful to us;
in this church
+ to us, individually ..

That we are who we are - by his grace

That the future - of this church - and our future - will continue to be blessed - challenged - pushed, but also loved and nurtured - by Jesus Christ.

Remember ... who you shall be ..

Amen